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ABSTRACT

Using Belize, Central America, as an example, this paper illustrates some of the changing patterns of cultural imperialism that can presently be viewed in the emerging nations of the world. Cultural imperialism is defined as the process whereby the culture of a weaker nation is dominated by that of a stronger nation. In September 1981, Belize, formerly British Honduras, gained its political independence from the United Kingdom. In the past the major force influencing the Belizean culture came from the British Isles. The trend now is toward an increasing pattern of Americanization and a corresponding decrease in British influence. The paper examines current imperialist patterns which reflect this trend: economic imperialism and socio-political imperialism. The private land in Belize is now largely owned by U.S. interests. In the worlds of finance and trade, there is also a growing North American orientation. The unit of currency in Belize is now the dollar. Many of Belize's exports such as sugar and seafood come to the United States. The U.S. influence can also be seen in the production process. The Hershey foods ship cacao to Pennsylvania and an American born doctor grows and sells mangoes to the United States. The U.S. socio-political imperialism can be seen in communications, migrations, and the military. For example, most vehicles in Belize are now American; one of the major sources of immigrants is North America and this is also the most important destination for emigrants; and the United States has recently agreed to provide training for the Belize Defense Force. (RM)

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**Changing Patterns of Cultural Imperialism in a
Developing Country**

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**A paper presented to the Annual Meetings of the Association
of American Geographers, San Antonio, Texas, April 26, 1982.**

INTRODUCTION

This paper will illustrate some of the changing patterns of cultural imperialism that can presently be viewed in the emerging nations of the world. Cultural imperialism is the process whereby the culture of a weaker nation is dominated by that of a stronger nation - where 'culture' is taken to be the "total way of life held in common by a group of people" (Jordan and Rowntree, 1979:30).

The example used in this research to illustrate these variations in cultural imperialism, over time and over space, will be that of Belize, Central America. This country only recently - in September 1981 - gained its political independence from the United Kingdom to become a separate member of the British Commonwealth of Nations as well as an individual member of what Buchanan terms the "commonwealth of poverty" - the Third World (1980:29).

It has been suggested that two of the "most glaring facts" in the contemporary world are:

- a) "the tremendous inequality, within and between nations in almost all aspects of human living conditions" and

(b) "the resistance of this inequality to change" (Galtung, 1980:261).

I will not be going into detail about the first fact although its truth will become apparent during the discussion. I will, however, be demonstrating a number of the variables which help to make the second fact a particularly significant contemporary problem. In particular, I will show that much of the resistance to change results from cultural imperialism which is not abating with the political independence of emerging nations but is rather being reinforced by influences that emanate from the new centre nations of the world - in this case the United States is 'taking over' as a cultural force from the United Kingdom.

Three phases (past, present, and potential future) and two types (economic, and socio-political) of cultural imperialism will be emphasised in this research. A stress will be placed on the contemporary situation in Belize, as this is where alternative sources of documentation are lacking, but a brief review of some of the history of Belize as a British Possession will be given in order to set the scene for the present-day patterns of interaction.

Cultural Imperialism in the Past

Although much of what is now Belize was once settled by the Maya, this ethnic group has not had a major effect upon the development of contemporary Belizean culture, although recently an awakening of the country to its "historic roots" gives an impression of a greater debt

than is in fact the case. The major force influencing the Belizean culture until recently came, as did so many that have shaped the contemporary Americas, from Europe - and especially from the British Isles. Consequently, all of the subcultures within Belize exhibit British or British derivative traits within their cultural baggage.

This external influence is clear even in the plural population of Belize which even more than the Americas in general had its origins in immigration. Many of the Maya that were present at the time of the arrival of Europeans in this area disappeared as "a result of the conquest and subsequent social dislocation, famine and epidemics" (Bolland, 1977:3-4). The British logwood cutters began importing black slaves early in the eighteenth century and this group were followed at later dates by Black Caribs, Spanish-Mexican colonists, Maya Indians, mestizos, some Chinese and Indian indentured labourers, and a variety of smaller units of immigrants.

The economy of the country has been similarly dominated by external influences. Originally logwood, and later mahogany and pine dominated trade and the country was organised as a "plantation - latifundia society" (Bolland et al, 1977:119) based upon timber exploitation rather than a crop such as sugar.

The forest products industry decreased in significance during the nineteenth century, however, and this decline has continued to the present day. Since the Second World War, the economy has been supplemented by more traditional patterns of tropical agriculture (such as sugar and fruit) and these have gradually assumed a greater significance in the export patterns of Belize. As with timber

exploitation this growth has, however, been very much dependent upon foreign ownership and guaranteed markets in Great Britain, and the United States.

Politically, Belize has always been strongly influenced by external forces. The British settlers were themselves continually troubled by the Spaniards and the settlement did not get any recognised status until 1760. The country did not become a Crown Colony until 1871 but then was not granted independence until 1981. This late date for independence may be largely attributed to a persistent threat from Guatemala (which still refuses to recognise Belize) rather than an attempt by the British government to hold onto colonial power. It is also a fact that independence was eventually gained because of outside influences and in particular from the O.A.S. and the U.N. In both the effects of U.S. pressure, in a complete departure from traditional policy were felt, and the United States government additionally contributed "by prevailing on the Guatemalans not to do anything that would (adversely) affect" Belize (George Price in The New Belize Vol XI, No. 9:14). Significantly, Belize's first diplomatic appointment as an independent nation later turned out to be a charge d'affaires in Washington, D.C.

Contemporary Imperialist Patterns

Although the cultural forces from outside Belize can be seen to have affected all elements of the country, a number of major thrusts can be identified and will be outlined in some detail in this paper. In particular the imperialist relationship with the economy will be investigated, and secondly some of the effects upon the socio-political realm will be documented.

(a) Economic Imperialism

In the various hinterland areas of the world, one constant question is how to escape the endemic poverty that characterises them. The problem of exactly what development is and how it should be attained has never been agreed upon (Berry, et al, 1976:265), but within Belize the common Western view which is defined "in terms of degrees of urbanisation, commercialisation, industrialisation, modernisation, and per capita production and consumption" has been adopted (Berry et al, 1976:265). One result of this has been that a dual economy has grown up.

Originally this dual economy was made up of the wood exploitation system and that of the traditional ways of life such as the slash and burn cultivation of the Maya. In recent years this pattern has been supplemented in part by two changes. The first is the changing significance of the more technologically advanced countries within the economy of Belize - particularly characterised by the increased visibility of the United States. The second is the increase of subsistence farming on the part of the indigenous populations - as a result of government encouragement and land settlement policies. Although both are important as they represent the imposition of a Heartland upon a Hinterland, only the former will be addressed in this paper. This will be demonstrated by a brief analysis of a number of sections of the economy of the country - **land ownership**, the financial sector, trade, and the **production process**.

(i) Land ownership

Prior to the early nineteenth century the question of land ownership in Belize was a thorny one - as Spanish claims to the land meant that actual land ownership was not allowed by the British Government. Land occupation and de facto ownership had gone on for some time, however, and by the time that the British officials attempted to exert some control a confused, but entrenched pattern of landholding already existed (Bolland et al, 1977:49-50).

When the cutting of timber shifted from logwood to mahogany extraction, the economics of this latter process concentrated land ownership (as it had then become) into the hands of a few wealthy cutters. This pattern of land ownership only held true, however, for the northern third of the country - much of the southern section having only become part of Belize by the efforts of the British during the 1830's. Eventually the process of land consolidation led to the monopolisation of freehold land within the country in the hands of a very few companies and most particularly (what in 1875 became) the Belize Estate and Produce Company Limited (BEC). "From its inception until the present day, this company has completely dominated the private ownership of land in Belize" (Bolland et al, 1977:77-78) and has "succeeded in becoming the most powerful organisation in the country" as evidenced by "the way it has influenced the legislation and dominated the economy of Belize" (Bolland et al, 1977:81). This and other such companies were also increasingly characterised by an element of absentee ownership.

The interests of this company have been arguably against the development of Belize in many instances, but the extent of its power cannot be disputed. This power included by the late nineteenth century the ownership of about one fifth of the country's land which constituted most of the land held as private property in Belize - the southern part of the colony being for the most part Crown land. The Belize Estate Company power has also been reflected in successful attempts to resist taxation, and in the prevention of the growth of agriculture on more than a subsistence basis. "The monopolisation of Belizean land by a handful of absentee owners was maintained throughout the century following (the formation of the Crown Colony in) 1871 and exists at present. That monopolisation has survived the various social, economic, and political changes. The basic change away from a forestry-dominated economy has not affected it" (Bolland et al, 1977:102) nor have the constitutional changes from Crown Colony through self government to constitutional independence.

What has changed, however, is the home country of the absentee owners - and this has particularly been the case since the end of World War II. Since this time many of the big landowners of the 1930's have disappeared - to be replaced by speculators from the USA. Partly as a consequence of this, in 1971 "foreigners owned 93.4% of all private lands over 100 acres" in size (Bolland et al, 1977:104) - and at least 90% of all freehold land in the country. In addition this land is the most agriculturally useful in Belize - being of generally good quality and with good access - in contrast to the government owned land.

Since 1971, the B.E.C. has been selling much of its land off - to U.S. speculators or to the Belizean government in lieu of taxes (Table One).

TABLE ONE: BELIZE ESTATE COMPANY
LAND SALES 1970-1980

YEAR	ACRES TO US CITIZENS	ACRES TO BELIZEAN GOVERNMENT	ACRES TO U.K. CITIZENS	OTHER SALES
1970	1.60	2,730.00	Nil	--
1971	1,963.00	6,309.00	"	1,545.00
1972	49,891.00	--	"	--
1973	18,469.94	4,430.17	"	1,020.00
1974	7,499.00	42,291.40	"	--
1975	32,095.00	78,571.00	"	--
1976	--	--	"	--
1977	2,400.00	28,975.00	"	--
1978	--	1,200.00	"	--
1979	--	--	"	--
1980	--	--	"	--

In May 1980, the balance of B.E.C. land in Belize, some 708,000 acres, was sold to Minter Naval Stores, Georgia, U.S.A.

Source: Belize Estate Company Records

The company still has the power to control price (by controlling supply) but has been uncertain about the political future of the country and has been adversely affected by a law on landholdings by aliens that was implemented on December 31st 1973. This law was specifically designed to discourage land speculation and to encourage land development by aliens and alien-controlled companies (Young, 1980:23-24). The Belize Estate Company has chosen to give up land rather than pay the taxes and the price of development on the land. In 1980 the process of sales took yet another turn when the company (by this time a subsidiary of a British Multinational Conglomerate) was sold en bloc to Minter Naval Stores, which is domiciled in Georgia. Consequently the private land in Belize is now largely owned by U.S. interests. No British citizens have bought land in the country - on any large basis - for many years. The country's orientation has noticeably changed.

(ii) The Financial Sector

The unit of currency in Belize is now the dollar (it used to be the pound) and until 1972 was fixed to sterling currency - and fluctuated in relation to the U.S. dollar. Because most of the country's external trade by 1972 was with countries not dealing in sterling - and most particularly the U.S. and Canada - the Belizean currency was pegged at that time to the U.S. unit. This swing to the U.S. is also reflected in the banking system.

The original banks in Belize were Barclay's (A British bank opened in 1948), and the Royal Bank (Canadian). These were joined by the Bank of Nova Scotia in 1968, and then by the Atlantic Bank in 1971. The latter

is one of the Chase Manhattan group and was set up "in recognition of Belize's state of development and growing North American orientation" (Atlantic Bank Manager, Conversation 1980). The banks have, of course, different financial orientations but for all, the North American share of their services is growing with the Atlantic Bank - with 90% of its business being U.S. oriented - having the strongest leaning in this direction.

As with most emerging countries Belize has a problem balancing its budget and the deficit is usually filled in part by overseas aid - and this has also recently assumed a greater orientation towards North America. A number of Canadian projects are helping the country and during the past few years Belize has been the recipient of more than \$7 million in U.S. aid through a special assistance programme (The New Belize, Vol. V, No. 5, 1981:14). It seems most likely that this kind of aid will be dramatically increased as the U.S. will look even more kindly on an independent Belize, and a recent agreement for economic cooperation signed with USAID is probably but the first step in such a pattern.

(iii) Trade

In recent years the pattern of Belizean exports of home produced goods has seen the rise of sugar to greatest dominance (over 56% of export value) followed by fruits and vegetables (7.3%), seafoods (6.7%), meat products (2.5%) and wood products (2.2%). (The export of marijuana reputedly is second in value but there is no official data on this subject.)

Sugar is now sold mostly to the U.S. (over 55%) and this country also takes all of the molasses output. The balance of the sugar has been sent to the U.K. The meat exports mostly go to Mexico, but the majority of the seafood (principally 'lobsters') goes to the U.S. The wood exports have also gone to the U.S. (which holds second place after Jamaica and before the U.K. which comes third). The fruit exports principally go the Caribbean as concentrates (but later may be re-exported to North America) or to the U.K. The exception is bananas which are wholly exported to the U.K. - but by a company which is a subsidiary of United Fruit - an American Corporation! In 1960 the U.S. was the market for 11% of Belizean exports with the U.K. taking 59%. By 1977 the U.S. proportion had soared to 46% and the U.K.'s share had dropped to 44%. This change included, of course, a larger total package of exports but also a larger proportionate share - from 70% to 90% of the total of Belizean exports. Again the swing to the United States has become quite clear, and will undoubtedly increase with the advent of the "Caribbean Basin Initiative".

The realm of imports has also steadily swung away from the U.K. - in part because of changing international conditions such as competition, in part because of Britain's entry to the Common Market which led to the severance of some preferential trading arrangements, in part because of the movement of Belize to the dollar block from sterling, and in part because of changing relative distances due to better communications with North America. For many of the major importing companies in Belize up to 75% of their trade is now in U.S. origin goods with the British proportion down to 10-15%. Once this swing had begun, an orientation to

U.S. electric voltage appliances, North American paper sizes and other such standards kept it going, and few British goods (other than Scotch Whisky) can now effectively compete in the Belizean marketplace.

(iv) The Production Process

Belize has also become increasingly attractive to overseas producers - in addition to the sugar, and fruit industries already discussed which are effectively foreign controlled. Thus Hershey foods are shipping cacao to Pennsylvania, Maya Tropical Plants ships houseplants to Miami, an American-born doctor grows and sells Mangoes to the U.S. and a number of Canadian and U.S. interests operate many of the country's most successful tourist facilities. There is also one "offshore", U.S. owned, garment making industry and a U.S. owned cattle business (with 5,000 head on 25,000 acres of land) which also produces honey and lumber as sidelines.

In addition to these (and many other similar operations) the most significant immigration into Belize in recent years has been of Mennonites - originally from Canada and now constituting the majority of the country's white population. The Mennonite colonies produce over 80% of Belizean broilers and eggs as well as corn and sorghum.

It is clear that economic imperialism is ripe in Belize despite independence and ranges throughout the economy - all the way to a controversial blood plasma bank - which also sells its produce to the United States. But it is not just in the economy that the overseas influence can be seen.

(b) Socio-political imperialism

The other major area in which cultural imperialism can be clearly seen in Belize is the socio-political area, and a number of illustrations of this influence will be given. Once again the trend has been toward an increasing pattern of Americanisation and a corresponding decrease in British influence. As the U.S. Consulate acknowledges this change is going to continue as these are "too many things in favour of the U.S. for the balance to switch back" (Personal Conversation, 1980).

(i) Communications

The only air routes out of Belize to the English speaking world are to the U.S. (Houston, New Orleans and Miami) and several of the sea routes reinforce this pattern. Similarly the land connection through Mexico has become an increasingly important channel for the movement of both temporary and permanent migrants in and out of the country. Most vehicles in Belize are now American and most have been driven down from the U.S. either by ambitious Americans trying to sell them for more than their U.S. value or by (more ambitious?) Belizeans who are also out to 'make a buck'. As a consequence the Belizean landscape - particularly in the urban centres - is characterized by derelict cars and barely more functional taxis.

The U.S. is now the biggest source of and destination for mail from Belize - often containing cheques for the family 'back home' from Belizeans now resident in North America. Radio programming has a noticeable American leaning and although there is no legal T.V. network,

a recent video boom has occurred amongst certain elite groups in the country. The only non Belizean newspaper that is readily available hails from Miami, and Newsweek and Time are among the most popular of the magazines sold - rivalling even 'Brukdown' the local newsmagazine that is edited by an American expatriate.

The American communications barrage is overwhelming. Even for the poorer classes who cannot afford many of the more expensive communication aids, the process of Americanisation is noticeable and ghetto-blaster tape decks are a status symbol for the young. In consequence the patterns of dress, social life, smoking, consumer goods in general, and even street language commonly ape the U.S. - and particularly the black U.S. - experience. At present some U.S. oil companies are exploring for new sources of crude to help keep all of this transformation under way.

(ii) Migrations

The movements of the populace reinforce this pattern further. One of the major sources of immigrants (both permanent and as tourists) is North America and this is also the most important destination for emigrants. At least 1% of Belizeans are probably eligible for U.S. citizenship as they were born (and often still reside) in the United States. Although the quota of Belizean emigrants to the U.S. has been small (as the country just filled part of the U.K.'s allocation until independence) there are probably between 35,000 and 50,000 Belizeans in the U.S. at present - at least two thirds of whom are "out of status" (illegal). They are attracted there both by the economic situation and

the culture - but also by the ease of movement by air, sea, and land. Many simply do not return after a trip to a relative or from a North American vacation which itself is a status symbol (U.S. Consulate, Personal Conversation, 1980).

(iii) The Military

Belize has had full internal self government since 1964, but the British Army has continued to be a factor in the country's external relations - particularly because of the problems with Guatemala. For many years the British Army has, in fact, been the most noticeable British presence in the landscape - as well as a valuable economic addition (the several thousand soldiers are a notable aid to the country's budget). With independence, however, this situation will eventually change, but it is clear that the British trained 'Belize Defense Force' is currently incapable of fulfilling its mission.

One consequence of this is that the U.S. is now assuming a position in Belize's defense policy - ironically perhaps lining up against the Guatemalan government which itself is not free of U.S. influence. The government of the U.S.A. recently agreed to provide training for the Belize Defense Force. This will include both training for the Force in the U.S. and/or Panama, and the visiting of Belize by U.S. military teams for training in Belize (The New Belize, Vol. 12, No. 1:15). It is clear that Ronald Reagan's 'Caribbean Basin Policy' does not exclude even Belize, and that every attempt will be made here to protect the current democratic process!

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the North American influence on Belize has increased in recent years and has become much more U.S. oriented. It is, in fact, now the dominant country in terms of cultural imperialism - although the British influence has by no means disappeared.

As mentioned earlier, some imports, part of the banking system, some exports and the British Army still reveal an orientation to the U.K. The police force is patterned after that in Britain and British aid is still given to Belize (for instance the telephone system was recently upgraded and extended by a British company). There are also many remaining signs of the British influence in the cultural landscape and this 'end of the earth' as Aldous Huxley once typified it, is still a fairly British place. But the changes that have recently occurred are obvious and their continuation seems inevitable. The last British vehicles will no doubt soon disappear and the last British mail box will be removed. Atlases may continue to colour the country pink for some time and some people may still find British Honduras a more recognizable name than Belize, but the Monroe Doctrine has undoubtedly been finally extended to all of the American landmasses, and the sun has set on one of Britain's last colonies.